



The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad & The Local Churches: Were They in Communion with Serbia and Jerusalem?

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Introduction

Within the last few years in the Orthodox Church in the United States, the question of what makes a church canonical has come to the surface. Many Orthodox Christians, catechumens and inquirers are being told that in order to be considered a “canonical church” one has to be in communion with the so-called local churches. In order to answer this question, we have to look to the Fathers of the Church. One such father who gives us insight into this matter is Saint Ignatius of Antioch. After he instructs us to separate from heretics saying, “that ye should keep aloof from such persons, and not to speak of them either in private or in public,” his Epistle to the Smyrnaeans teaches us where the canonical church is [1]. In Chapter VIII, Saint Ignatius teaches us saying,

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid [2].

The two criteria for maintaining apostolic succession are that the bishops have been canonically consecrated by bishops who have historical apostolic succession themselves and that they are maintaining the Orthodox faith. In the recent history of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad prior to the 2007 union with the Moscow Patriarchate, there have been many different accusations leveled at this jurisdiction concerning its canonicity in the past.



The Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Jerusalem.

Often people accused them of being schismatics for not being in communion with any of the local churches or ancient patriarchates; while others have been under the false impression that ROCOR was in communion with both the Serbian Patriarchate and the Jerusalem Patriarchate during their whole history up until the union of 2007 with Moscow. As many may also know, the Church Abroad was for a long period of time in communion with the Greek Old Calendarist Churches to include both the Matthewites and Florinites at various points in time. This has given rise to historical revisionists who have denied that this communion existed even though the historical documentation for these unions is plentiful.

Many of these historical revisionists, who like to claim that the Greek Old Calendarist Church is schismatic for not being in communion with a local church, also like to embellish the history of the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, the Serbian Patriarchate and the Jerusalem Patriarchate, so that the ROCOR cannot be put in the same category as the Greek Old Calendarist Churches.

It is a historical fact that the Russian Church Abroad was in communion with the Serbian and Jerusalem Patriarchate during its early history. However, that did not last as long as many revisionists would like us to believe, and of course, according to the logic of some, this would have made the ROCOR schismatic as well. To understand this history, we have to examine the historical evidence that exists concerning the eucharistic relationships between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and the Serbian and Jerusalem Patriarchates.

The Jerusalem Patriarchate

First, let us analyze the relationship between the Church Abroad and the Jerusalem Patriarchate. To examine this history, we can look to the Moscow Patriarchate Post-Graduate and Doctoral University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and a doctoral dissertation that was entirely dedicated to the subject concerning the relationship between the ROCOR and the Jerusalem Patriarchate. This dissertation, entitled *The Activity of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem in 1948-1967* by Dr. Palamarenko Evgeny Viktorovich, details at great length the relationship between the Church Abroad and the Jerusalem Patriarchate. According to the detailed history by Dr. Viktorovich,

Until 1945, the Jerusalem Patriarchate maintained communion with representatives of the ROCOR, without identifying them as schismatics or hindering their activities. There were isolated cases of the Jerusalem Patriarch not recognizing the heads of the Mission, but overall, prayerful communion and the possibility of co-service were preserved until the historical visit of Patriarch Alexy I with a delegation from Moscow in 1945. Under the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Jerusalem Patriarchate reconsidered its relationship with the representatives of the ROCOR in Palestine, delicately indicating to them the necessity of submission to the Moscow Patriarchate, while simultaneously ceasing prayerful communion with them and no longer allowing them to concelebrate in its churches.

According to the memoirs of the pilgrim Alexandra Gavrilova, in 1946 the Russian metochion was surrounded by a long and high stone wall, and the Trinity Cathedral towered in the middle of the square. Within the walls of the metochion there were two main gates and a small wicket in one corner, which were guarded by Palestinian sentries, perhaps because most of the Russian buildings were occupied by various government offices or because the metochion was a strategic point. According to her, the terrorists had previously tried to blow up the Trinity Cathedral, as evidenced by the damaged dome.

Considering the presence of the REM [Russian Ecclesiastical Mission] under the jurisdiction of the ROCOR during the period of the British Mandate, it should be noted the positive role played by the church leadership abroad in the preservation of Russian church property under the mandatory administration. In 1948, in connection with the arrival of the REM [Russian Ecclesiastical Mission] of the Moscow Patriarchate and the disagreement with the latter on the part of the REM of ROCOR, the Russian church representation in Jerusalem, a hundred years after its establishment, was divided into two wings, supporters and opponents of the Moscow Patriarchate. The following decades were associated with the sheer antagonism that Russian Orthodox Christians, both ordinary believers and representatives of the hierarchy, felt towards each other. The arrival of representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, which radically renewed the composition of the REM and the directions of its activities, marked the beginning of a new period of the Russian Orthodox presence in Palestine [3].

As we can see, the Jerusalem Patriarchate did maintain communion with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in 1945 and that the Church Abroad was in no way considered schismatic by this patriarchate. However, we have to further ask how long did this communion last? Did this eucharistic communion between the ROCOR and the Jerusalem Patriarchate last as long as the modern historical revisionists would like us to believe? Dr Viktorovich continues in his historical dissertation saying,

An important event in the subsequent revival of the presence of the REM in Jerusalem, affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, was the visit of Patriarch Alexy I to Palestine in June 1945. The arrival of the Moscow Patriarch in Jerusalem opens a chain of events that were preparatory to the resumption of the service of the Moscow Patriarchate's REM in Palestine in 1948.

Before his trip to the Middle East in 1945, Patriarch Alexy I informed the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church of his desire to visit a number of countries, the first on the list of which was Palestine, and also informed about the composition of the seven persons selected to accompany him. In fact, the sequence of Patriarch Alexy I's visits to the Middle Eastern states was as follows: Lebanon – Syria – Palestine – Egypt.

The question of Patriarch Alexy I's trip to the Middle East and Palestine was raised by the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church with Stalin on May 3, 1945, and on May 4 it received a positive answer. It is possible that the trip was initiated by the Soviet government in the context of relations between the Soviet leadership and the Russian Orthodox Church in the interests of Moscow's policy in the Mediterranean, a topic that is practically unexplored at present.

At the same time, the position of the chairman of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, G.G. Karpov, who called on the Russian Orthodox Church to use church channels in the political interests of the Soviet Union, is well known. As a result, the Council launched numerous initiatives to involve the Russian Orthodox Church in international work. It was intended to use the Church as a tool to strengthen Russian influence abroad, including in the largest cities of the world, where embassy churches and missions had previously operated.

One of the reasons for Metropolitan Gregory (Chukov) visiting Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, and later Palestine, in November-December 1946 for talks with the Primate of the Local Churches, was the intention of the country's leadership to exert influence on the Eastern Patriarchates, which, in the opinion of the Soviet authorities, enjoyed great influence in the Orthodox world.

It is possible that the ecclesiastical policy of the USSR in the Middle East pursued the goal of placing the Soviet Union among the states that hoped to participate in the collective guardianship of Palestine.

On May 24 and 25, 1945, Deputy Head of the Middle East Department of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, N.P. Ivanov, and other employees held a conversation and consultation with Patriarch Alexy I and his entourage in order to “get acquainted with the countries of the Middle East (climate, communication routes, local customs and mores, etiquette, currency and prices).” On May 27, 1945, Liturgy and a moleben were served at the Epiphany Cathedral in Moscow, and a farewell dinner was held at the Patriarchate. On May 28, 1945, at 3:30 a.m., a specially-provided aircraft took off from Moscow.

The month-long trip to the Middle East included only a five-day stay of the delegation in Palestine (from June 1 to June 5, 1945). During this time, Patriarch Alexy I was received by the British High Commissioner in Palestine, Lord Gort, and other dignitaries; He performed the blessing of water on the Jordan, visited the Gorny Monastery and a number of other places. In a telegram to Moscow, Patriarch Alexy I reported that in Jerusalem the members of the delegation “met with great attention from the patriarch, the government, the clergy and the people.” At the same time, by order of the head of the REM ROCOR, Archimandrite Anthony (Sinkevich), several churches in Jerusalem were closed so that the Patriarch could not visit them. As reported by Reuters, these measures caused outrage among the members of the Russian colony in Jerusalem, and Archimandrite Anthony’s secretary asked for a personal meeting with Patriarch Alexy I to apologize for the behavior of the chief. Archimandrites Meletios (Rozov) and Ambrose (Sorokin) also met secretly with Patriarch Alexy I.

From the report of Archimandrite Anthony (Sinkevich) it is known that in the Russian monasteries on the Mount of Olives and in Gethsemane, Patriarch Alexy I unexpectedly appeared, accompanied by his own and a Greek retinue. In the churches of both monasteries, he went into the altar. In Gethsemane, Abbot Seraphim (Sedov) defiantly refused to take a blessing from Patriarch Alexy I, and the nuns of the monasteries did not approach the Patriarch. It is noteworthy that half a century later, almost the same situation was repeated during the visit of Patriarch Alexy II to Jerusalem, when the abbess of the Mount of Olives Monastery refused to allow the Patriarch to enter the monastery.

As a result of Patriarch Alexy I’s visit to Palestine, in the summer of 1945, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem ceased its ties with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, as they did not recognize the Moscow Patriarchate. From that time on, the concelebration of the clergy of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem with the clergy of ROCOR in Palestine ceased. The latter were admitted to the holy places only as pilgrims. In turn, the Greek and Arab clergy were issued an order by Patriarch Timothy not to participate in divine services in ROCOR churches, although their visits without serving in them subsequently repeatedly took place [4].

As we can see this eucharistic communion was broken very early in the life of ROCOR in 1945 as a result of Patriarch Alexy I of the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate entering into communion with the Jerusalem Patriarchate. During this period of history, it was very well known that the Russian Church Abroad would not enter into Eucharistic communion with those jurisdictions that were in communion with the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate, which was not only unrepentant for their capitulation to the godless-soviet authorities in 1927 by Sergius but who, by this time, were actively cooperating with the soviet government.



Patriarch Alexy I and Patriarch Alexander III of Antioch (right) in Jerusalem, 1945.

It should be noted that over the course of time, although the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Jerusalem Patriarchate were not in Eucharistic communion with each other and did not concelebrate with each other as these letters show, some members of the Russian Church Abroad living in Jerusalem continued to commemorate the Jerusalem Patriarchate and use antimensons originally provided by the Jerusalem Patriarchate according to some sources. The reason for this could be multifaceted, possibly due to ignorance, laziness, indifference or out of habit, but this was a localized issue/practice and as the history shows was not applicable to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Jerusalem Patriarchate relations as a whole.

The Serbian Patriarchate

Just like the relationship between the Jerusalem Patriarchate and the ROCOR, many people also have developed a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Serbian Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad as well. Many are under the impression that ROCOR was in communion with the Serbian Patriarchate for their entire existence so that they can claim ROCOR was “canonical” on the basis that they were in communion with a local church.



Patriarch Alexy I. To his left is the Serbian Patriarch Herman, to the right is the Coptic Patriarch Kirill VI.

Many conservative new calendarists, historical revisionists, and “resist within” ideologues who are promulgating the narrative that the Greek Old Calendarist are schismatics because they are not in communion with a local church are trying to skew the history of ROCOR to say that they were always in communion with the Serbian Patriarchate so they can spin ROCOR’s history to suit their historical narrative and support their ideological agenda. However, sifting through the historical evidence available uncovers the historical reality, and we can see that what is being displayed as truth by many historical revisionists is in reality pure obfuscation to push a specific narrative. The first place to look is in the letters between hierarchs that were written contemporaneously. The first primary source historical material we will examine is a memorandum from Sergianist Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov) who wrote,

Memo from Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov) with proposals regarding the clerics of the Russian Church Abroad in Yugoslavia January 27, 1945

Note on Russian Churches in Serbia Glory to God, the Karlovac schism in Serbia has ended! The remaining leaders (Metropolitan Anastasius and 2-3 other bishops) fled to the Germans. The remnants of the Serbian emigration do not require special care, except for what is already provided by the Serbian Patriarchate. However, I believe that for the sake of maintaining ties with the Mother Church of Russia and for clarifying the position of the Russian flock in Serbia, it is proposed through the Serbian Church to do the following: a) to commemorate - after the Serbian Patriarch - the name of the Patriarch of the Russian Church, b) for the clergy to renounce in writing the Karlovac center (Metropolitan Anastasius and other bishops), c) and to ask the Serbian Church to definitively and decisively put an end to the “Karlovac” schism.

[Signed]

Metropolitan Benjamin [5].

This letter from this Sergianist Metropolitan is referencing ROCOR and Metropolitan Anastasius as a schism from the so-called Moscow Patriarchate, which in times past was referred to as the “Karlovci schism” since the bishops of the Russian Church Abroad lived in Karlovic, Serbia with the blessing of then Patriarch Varnava. This January 1945 letter tells us that it was on the agenda of the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate to coerce the Serbians to break communion with the ROCOR in favor of recognizing the Soviet Patriarchate instead.

In a letter dated April 18th, 1945, from Metropolitan Joseph (Tsviyovich) the Metropolitan of Skopje to Bishop Sergey (Larin) a representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, is responding to a letter that the Sergianist Bishop Sergey (Larin) had previously wrote to the Metropolitan of Skopje. Metropolitan Joseph of Skopje delivers to Sergey (Larin) a decision of the Serbian Patriarchate concerning the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and its hierarchs saying,

Letter from Metropolitan Joseph (Tsviyovich) to Bishop Sergey (Larin) in response to the proposal to condemn the Russian Church Abroad [6].

April 18, 1945

To His Grace, Bishop of Kirovograd and Administrator of the Odessa Diocese, Mr. Sergey, as a representative of His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

Regarding YOUR fraternal esteemed letter dated April 16, 1945, in which you, as the Representative of HIS HOLINESS THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA, kindly expressed a desire for our Church to also condemn the activities of the Russian emigrant episcopate and clergy directed against the Mother Russian Church, as the Council of Russian Bishops on September 8, 1943 in Moscow condemned, we have the honor, based on the decision of the Holy Hierarchical Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to provide the following response:

The Serbian Orthodox Church, guided by established canonical order, has always maintained canonical communion with the Russian Orthodox Church and recognized the Orthodox Church headed by the late Patriarch Tikhon as the only lawful and canonical Russian Church.

Our Church did this despite all the difficulties it encountered in its communication, either due to the divisions within the Russian Church itself or due to its failure to establish relations with other Orthodox Churches in the East. As evidence of this, we cite the fact that our Church never recognized not only separate church factions that illegally arose within the Russian Church but also the independence of its separate parts, such as the Churches in Poland, Ukraine, Finland, Latvia, and others.

Based on such a position, the Serbian Orthodox Church has since 1920 accepted some refugee bishops and priests of the Russian Church onto its territory as guests, granting them certain rights of church activity among its Russian flock of refugees. It did this out of great love for the Russian Church and the Russian people and with the aim of preserving their national consciousness and church customs at that time. When these fleeing Russian bishops and clergy were an integral part of the Russian hierarchy, which was undergoing persecution.

When the division occurred between the Patriarchal Church in Russia and the fleeing Russian hierarchy abroad, the Serbian Orthodox Church, starting from 1922, always endeavored and insisted on their reconciliation. It did not wish to interfere in the internal affairs and disagreements of the Russian Church, especially since the Russian church circumstances in Russia were not yet established and clarified due to the revolution.

At that time, our Church found it challenging to comprehend the true church situation in Russia because there were cases when even the Patriarch Tikhon, who had reposed in God, was condemned at local councils in Russia. Due to the state of affairs in Russia, some Orthodox Churches in the East reached a point where they did not recognize the Tikhonite Patriarchate in Russia, as was the case, as far as we remember, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself.

Now, when normal church circumstances have been established in Russia, and when our Church is able to freely, canonically, and unimpededly communicate with the Patriarchal Russian Church, which it has always recognized as the only lawful Church in Russia, the Serbian Church is ready to sever all church communion with all those church factions of the Russian hierarchy that the Russian Patriarchy has condemned as illegal and non-canonical according to existing canonical regulations.

As for Archbishop Hermogenes, who, through his actions, caused great harm to the Serbian Church, our Church will bring him to trial and condemn him if the Russian Church does not do so, but we would prefer the Russian Church to take this action.

Based on the above, we request that the Russian Church kindly deliver its resolution, from which it will be clear which Russian hierarchs are specifically considered excommunicated as schismatics, with whom the Serbian Orthodox Church and all other autocephalous Orthodox Churches must cease their canonical relations and church communion. When such a resolution is received, the Holy Hierarchical Synod will immediately cease all church communion with them and promptly inform the Holy Hierarchical Council about it.

To Your Grace, a devoted brother and co-servant in Christ,

For the Chairman of the Holy Hierarchical Synod,
Metropolitan of Skopje, Joseph

The Russian translation fully corresponds to the Serbian original and is certified by the signature and appropriate seal.

Rev. Nikolay Alagich

As is clear in this preceding 1945 letter, the Serbian Patriarchate at this time is now changing their position on the canonicity and legitimacy of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in favor of the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate, despite previously having supported the ROCOR fully and having been in Eucharistic communion with them.



Patriarch Gravillo & Metropolitan Joseph of Skopje

In a response letter from Sergianist Bishop Sergey (Larin) to Metropolitan Joseph of Skopje dated April 21st, 1945, the Moscow Patriarchate gets even stronger in their demands that the Serbian Patriarchate must immediately cease all communion with the Russian Church Abroad without any ambiguity in the matter. We can also see Bishop Sergey in true Soviet and Sergianist fashion denying that there was any persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church during the period of the USSR and also refers to the Russian Church Abroad as schismatics who separated from the so-called “Mother Church.” It is this same narrative today that many of these conservative new calendarists are pushing as part of their renovationist history. In this lengthy letter, Soviet MP Bishop Sergey Larin writes to Metropolitan Joseph of Skopje,

Letter from Bishop Sergey (Larin) to Metropolitan Joseph (Tsviyovich) and the Synod of the Serbian Church demanding the termination of relations with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad [7].

April 21, 1945

Having received Your Grace's fraternal letter, I could not help but notice some ambiguity in its presentation:

Your Eminence mentioned that the Serbian Orthodox Church provided support to Russian hierarchs-emigrants, whom, in your opinion, were an integral part of the Russian Orthodox Church undergoing persecution. What persecution of the Church in Russia (USSR) are you writing about? The Russian Orthodox Church as a whole did not experience any persecution. In this case, Your Eminence relied on the emigrant and other hostile Russian press, which, as a representative of HIS HOLINESS THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW, I cannot but regret.

Your Eminence was pleased to outline in the following manner the formation and separation from the Mother Church of the so-called “Archbishopric Synod” in Sremski Karlovci: “When the division occurred between the Patriarchal Church in Russia and the fleeing Russian hierarchy abroad, the Serbian Orthodox Church, starting from 1922, always endeavored and insisted on their reconciliation.”

In my understanding, reconciliation can only be between sister churches of equal status, not between the Mother Church and a self-styled assembly of schismatics who have arbitrarily separated from it. We cannot but regret that the Serbian Orthodox Church officially supported our schismatics of the emigrant hierarchy and its central organ, the so-called “Archbishopric Synod.”

In my letter of April 16 of this year, I had the honor to inform Your Eminence and very clearly state which emigrant bishops we consider to be in schism with the Russian Church. Firstly: Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky), and secondly: all the foreign hierarchs-emigrants included in the jurisdiction of the so-called “Archbishopric Synod.”

The Russian Orthodox Church hopes that Your Eminence, Your Grace, and the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in accordance with the expression of Your will in your esteemed letter of April 18 of this year, will sever all canonical and eucharistic communion with the so-called “Archbishopric Synod” as a whole and with Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky) in particular as schismatics, as well as with their followers both in Yugoslavia and in all countries wherever they may be.

Please inform the Heads of the Autocephalous Churches about this.

Your Eminence,

I have the honor to be your brother, co-servant, supplicant, and most humble servant

Bishop of Kirovograd

Representative of HIS HOLINESS THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

In response to this letter pervious letter to Soviet Bishop Sergey (Larin), Metropolitan Joseph of Skopje writes a reply dated April 24th, 1945, this time to Patriarch Alexy I informing them of the cessation of communion between the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. In this letter, Metropolitan Joseph of Skopje as the Deputy of the Patriarch of Serbia writes,

Letter from Metropolitan Joseph (Tsviyovich) to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy reporting the cessation of communion between the Serbian Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad [8].

April 24, 1945

Your Holiness!

Regarding the letter from the Representative of YOUR HOLINESS, His Grace Bishop of Kirovograd and Administrator of the Odessa Diocese, Mr. Sergey, dated April 21, 1945, in which His Grace, in connection with our letter of April 18, 1945, Syn. No. 664/entry 175 of 1945, reminds that among the Russian bishops-emigrants in schism with the Russian Church, first of all, Metropolitan Anastasius (Gribanovsky) and all those under the jurisdiction of the so-called Archbishopric Synod of foreign hierarchs-emigrants must be considered - I have the honor to respond to YOUR HOLINESS as follows:

Although His Grace Bishop Sergey of Kirovograd did not provide a full response to our aforementioned letter of April 18/5, 1945, Syn. No. 664/entry 175 of 1945, as he did not convey the resolution of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943, from which not only the names of Russian bishops-emigrants could be seen, but also the canonical reasons based on which these hierarchs were recognized as schismatics at the time - the Holy Hierarchical Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church nonetheless takes note of the statement of His Grace Bishop Sergey of Kirovograd as a statement made on behalf of the Russian Church and terminates all canonical and eucharistic communion with Metropolitan Anastasius and those Russian bishops-emigrants who are under his jurisdiction or under the jurisdiction of the so-called Overseas Russian Archbishopric Synod, which was condemned by the Russian Orthodox Church.

This question in its entirety will be presented for final consideration and determination to the Holy Hierarchical Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as this issue may be the subject of discussion not only in our Church but also in other Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, before whom these condemned bishops may have the opportunity to provide their explanations.

Your Holiness,

In Christ's love, a suppliant and devout admirer

Deputy of HIS HOLINESS THE PATRIARCH OF SERBIA

Metropolitan of Skopje, Joseph

In this final letter it is made abundantly clear that eucharistic communion with the Serbian Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia was ended in the spring of 1945. In another Memorandum from the Patriarchates of Moscow, Antioch, and Jerusalem threaten the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad with ecclesiastical judgment for ROCOR's so-called schism from the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate. This letter reads,

Memorandum of the Patriarchs of Moscow Alexy, of Alexandria Christoforos, of Antioch Alexander, and of Jerusalem Timotheos regarding the attitude toward the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad [9].

After June 14, 1945

A portion of the Russian church hierarchy, which emigrated in 1920 from Russia under the leadership of Metropolitan Antony, while abroad, separated from the Mother Russian Church and organized an independent Supreme Church Administration in Sremski Karlovci.

After a series of admonitions, the Locum Tenens of the Patriarchate, Metropolitan Sergius, in 1930 imposed a prohibition on this church group, led after the death of Metropolitan Antony by Metropolitan Anastasius.

During the last war with Nazi Germany, the majority of hierarchs and clergy of this Karlovac orientation openly sided with Hitler and offered public prayers for his victory. In the near future, the Moscow Patriarchate will appeal to the Karlovci community with a final call for their return to the fold of the Mother Church, and upon those who remain deaf to this call, will declare ecclesiastical judgment for the schism committed and for betrayal of the common Christian cause in the fight against fascism.

Alexy, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

Fully agree with the sentiment of this address

Alexander III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

Timotheos, Patriarch of Jerusalem

As we can see from the historical evidence, it is clear that the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia was not in communion with the local churches for the majority of their existence. What is also noteworthy regarding all these events concerning the World Orthodox Patriarchates breaking communion with the Russian Church Abroad is that this is all taking place in the spring and summer of 1945 and recognizably under the direction and influence of the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate and the government of the U.S.S.R.

Another aspect that we need to look at is the internal historical evidence from within the Russian Church Abroad concerning their eucharistic communion with other Orthodox Churches. One place we can gain much historical evidence from is the private letters of Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose). In multiple letters from Father Seraphim dating between 1962-1982 he explains to those he was writing to that the Russian Church Abroad is not in communion with other “global Orthodox” jurisdictions, to use his own terminology. For example, in Letter 51 to Father David Black dated June 8/21, 1970, Father Seraphim Rose writes,

The Synod’s position of truth and principle, of what Orthodoxy is and what it is not, will be presented in detail in future publications. Our Orthodox Word will soon print Fr. Michael Azkoul’s excellent reply to Fr. Schmemmann’s attack on the “Sorrowful Epistle” (Fr. Meyendorff turned it down, predictably), in the hope of setting straight Fr. Schmemmann’s distortions and faulty theology. Fr. Michael has now come to the Synod—not because he thinks that Metr. Philip is a heretic, but because in not breaking of with Moscow over the issue of giving communion to Roman Catholics he enters also into crypto-Uniatism, as the Metropolia already has done far more decisively. “Global Orthodoxy” has not listened to the Synod’s pleas, and therefore those who wish to remain Orthodox have no choice but to leave “global Orthodoxy.” In the 15th century those who were not with St. Mark of Ephesus were not in the Church—and this situation is being approached today. [10].

Father Seraphim in his Letter 253, dated April 10/23, 1978, to Mr. Stamos writes,

With regard to “jurisdictions,” we are in full communion with the Greek Old-Calendarist jurisdiction of Archbishop Auxentios in Athens and with the Catacomb Church in Russia; with other jurisdictions our relations are strained, and in some cases broken altogether (owing to the sad history of 20th-century Orthodoxy, outlined above). Our Church as a whole simply refuses to accept the excommunications hurled by the various jurisdictions against each other under the heated circumstances of controversy; but on the other hand, a state of free intercommunion does not exist between us. In our own case, we would not be able to concelebrate with the priests of any other jurisdiction; as for laymen (whose responsibility in these sad divisions is much less, but who still must be striving to be conscious and responsible Christians), those who wish to receive Holy Communion must go to confession first and must be prepared to accept instruction from the priest in preserving oneself in true Orthodoxy [11].

The last piece of internal historical evidence that we can examine is from a publication from Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, entitled *The Truth about the Russian Church Abroad* by Michael Rodzianko in the 2002 edition. In this latter edition with an appendix from Rassaphor- Monk Vsevolod (1996) , the author details the contemporary situation of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and who they are in communion with. In this *Jordanville* publication it states,

The Church Abroad, being sufficiently well informed about the character and aims, so pernicious for the Church, of the Ecumenical Movement, is not a member of the World Council of Churches and does not take part in any of its work whatsoever. Moreover, under Ecumenism, instead of an open and vocal witness to Orthodoxy, the Orthodox Churches travel a path searching for compromising dogmatic, ecclesiological, and other commonalities with non-Orthodox and even non-Christian confessions. The leadership of the Church Abroad has more than once expressed its negative attitude toward ecumenism and has not changed this position till this day.

More evidence of the correct path of the Church Abroad, besides the above mentioned, is that her ties with her sister Old Calendar Churches, in Greece, Rumania and Bulgaria, are being supported and strengthened. However, the Church Abroad has no canonical union with the eastern Patriarchates, which represent “official Orthodoxy,” because of their participation in the Ecumenical Movement and their acceptance of the New Calendar. [12]

Finally, in the last historical example we have from the Russian Church Abroad is a letter from Archbishop Leonty (Filippovich) in 1966 writing Bishop Petros of Astoria from Chile saying,

Paschal greetings from me to Brother Gerasim, and Dimitry. Some of the Serbian monks are rather displeased with me, that I do not recognize Bp. Dionysii as a bishop. Of course, I cannot recognize him.

And the fact that he together with the ‘self-consecrators’, ordained for himself an assistant, and then they, with their chicken brains, argue that he can be received by repentance. Well, that’s the Athonites for you! Hieromonk Stephan at the Church of St. Savvas in Karyes is of the same opinion. I likewise do not recognize Patriarch Herman. And Dionysii was subordinate to them before he was banned, and was deposed of his disgraceful conduct by them. The Serbian Church should receive a bishop from us, as did the Bulgarian. I have written Archbishop Averky more than once concerning this. That he, together with you, or with others, consecrate Archimandrite Arsenius, with the permission of Metropolitan Philaret. There is [no] other way out for the Serbs.

Be well and preserved by God. I ask for your hierarchal prayers.

Your loving brother and suppliant before God,

Archbishop + Leonty

Now according to some conservative new calendarist personalities on the internet and those who get their inaccurate history from them, this makes the Russian Church Abroad during this period schismatic. What these people are saying in essence is that Saint John of Shanghai, Saint Philaret of New York, Archbishop Averky of Jordanville, Archbishop Savva of Edmonton, and Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), etc. were also schismatic and died outside of the communion of the Orthodox Church because they did not repose in communion with a local church, despite some of these ROCOR saints being incorrupt in repose.



Private Letter from Archbishop Leonty of Chile to Bishop Petros of Astoria (April 1966) Also Not Recognizing Serbian Patriarchate

The historical evidence shows us that as early as 1945, into the 1970's and as far as the early 2000's ROCOR did not (as far as we know based on the information currently available) maintain Eucharistic communion with any Orthodox Patriarchate but was instead in communion with the Old Calendarist Churches of Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania.

So, now we have to ask, is a criterion for canonicity to be in communion with at least one particular local church, as many are constantly preaching and teaching or does canonicity rely on what the Fathers teach us, which is the maintaining of Orthodox Christian doctrine and receiving apostolic succession by two or more canonical hierarchs through the laying on of hands? Can an Orthodox Hierarch openly preach and teach heresy, or a local synod adopt heresy as a body (i.e. Ecclesiology of the World Council of Churches) and still claim to be “canonical”?

It is clear that the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad during this period received their apostolic succession from the Russian Church prior to the schism and apostasy of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1927 with the adoption of Sergius’ Declaration of Loyalty to the God-hating Atheist Soviets and long before the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate became a full member and adopted the Ecclesiology of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Although not in communion with any of these “official” Patriarchates or local churches, ROCOR was nonetheless entirely Orthodox in its doctrines, maintained its historical apostolic succession, and was truly a canonical Orthodox Christian Church.

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